

**Agricultural Food and Research Initiative FY 2015  
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program  
(SNAP and EFNEP): Regional Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Centers of Excellence  
AFRI-RNECE – FY 2015 –**

**Frequently Asked Questions for MODIFIED RFA, which was posted 21 May 2015**

Please note, all RNECE RFA information can now be found on the NIFA RNECE webpage, <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/program/regional-nutrition-education-and-obesity-prevention-centers-excellence-rnece>. The AFRI RNECE RFA can be found under the title Fiscal Year 2015. RNECE specific content begins on page 11 – program area code A2151. The FY 2014 RNECE RFA which was funded under a separate solicitation, can be found under related funding opportunities at the bottom of the page.

Related AFRI-RNECE information that is found on the NIFA RNECE webpage include:

- 1) AFRI – RNECE RFA – overview webinar
- 2) Webinar slides
- 3) Frequently asked questions about the RFA – with NIFA’s response – **updated regularly**
- 4) Other supporting information and documents

After you have reviewed these resources, if you still cannot find answers to your questions, contact, Ms. Marly Diallo or Helen Chipman.

Ms. Marly Diallo, Program Specialist  
mdiallo@nifa.usda.gov  
202-401-0293

Dr. Helen Chipman, National Program Leader  
hchipman@nifa.usda.gov  
202-720-8067

**ALL FUTURE COMMUNICATIONS, regarding the AFRI-RNECE will be posted here – on the RNECE webpage. Most recent questions and responses are listed at the top of the Q&A page.**

-----  
**Questions thru 4 June 2015**

**Eligibility – Principle Investigators and Other Key Leadership of Current Funded RNECE Centers**

Are the five institutions that were awarded RNECE funding under a separate solicitation eligible to apply for these AFRI grants? Who else can apply?

Awardees of the existing centers are eligible apply for the AFRI RNECE grants, as are colleges and universities; 1994 Land-Grant Institutions; and Hispanic-serving agricultural colleges and universities, as defined in the RFA. Eligibility is determined according to the AFRI funding authority. Other interested organizations and persons who have the appropriate expertise, capacity, and commitment are encouraged to partner with eligible institutions.

Can two or more organizations/agencies apply as co-chairs for a single grant?

NIFA will fund only one host site for each grant. However, organizations/agencies are welcome to work out co-chair leadership responsibilities among themselves to determine how to best share grant leadership and management responsibilities.

### **New Policy, Systems, and Environmental Change (PSE) Center**

If we have considerable PSE expertise within our organization, particularly with respect to SNAP-Ed, would that make us a strong applicant for the new PSE regional center?

Such expertise is important. To further strengthen your proposal, it would be important to draw upon PSE experience and expertise more broadly since the RNECE Initiative is a national initiative. You might consider other colleagues who have other PSE experience and expertise who may bring added value to what you propose. Also, it's important to note that the PSE Center will be expected to inform SNAP-Ed and EFNEP. These programs are distinct in their potential use of PSE interventions. Both programs should benefit from having this center.

The five 'opportunities' for the PSE Center listed on page 13 sound like a required scope of work, but hundreds of materials such as community assessment tools, guidance manuals, evaluations, and excellent websites have already been cited in the newly released 2016 *SNAP-Ed Guidance*. States are expected to build on these existing resources now, to apply what's best for their work, and to keep up with this rapidly changing environment. It sounds like the new PSE Center is being charged with creating a duplicative electronic site rather than coaching practitioners to navigate and apply the plethora of existing and rapidly changing resources. Is this what is expected? Is this mandatory to receive points during scoring, or will other more innovative approaches be considered equivalent on a scoring tool?

As stated for item 9, on page 13, the requirement is to leverage and extend successful interventions through at least one of five ways. This is in accordance with the RNECE Initiative's purpose which is, in part, to strengthen the evidence-base on effective nutrition education/obesity prevention programs for diverse populations groups (e.g. to identify and confirm what works). Although implementing agencies are already expected to utilize and build-upon evidence-based practices, there is some question as to how much and how well that is happening for PSE interventions. The new PSE Center is expected to facilitate improved application of evidence-based PSE interventions through at least one of the five opportunities noted. Applications will be scored less favorably if this requirement is not met.

### **New Research Project**

For the research projects, should the evaluation/comparison be done on new ways that the programs may be implemented going forward or on what is currently happening?

The intent of this project is to conduct a rigorous evaluation of program participation versus non-participation, according to the way that the programs are currently being conducted and program policy. Pre-/post-participation self-report data has been collected for EFNEP to assess behavior change since the program began. Similarly, many SNAP-Ed programs have collected such data since that program began. A more rigorous analysis, which also compares those who participate and those who do not, is needed to help us have greater confidence in the monitoring that is in place, identify more substantive changes that are occurring, and/or recognize where/how to strengthen program implementation and monitoring. If applicants wish to evaluate a new way of conducting the programs as a subset of the larger comparison analysis, that would be their choice.

How large in scope should the signature research project be – one program/both programs (e.g. SNAP-Ed and/or EFNEP); a small defined group, state, or multi-state data?

The RNECE initiative is intended to strengthen and inform both programs. Thus, both programs should be included.

Regarding the breadth of participation in the research project, the RFA does not stipulate that the project must be a multi-state project. That said, careful attention should be given to how the research design will reflect differences in program size and geographic location – small, mid-sized, and large programs, and including both urban and rural areas at high risk for obesity.

What data is currently collected within these programs?

For EFNEP, there is the WebNEERS data. See <http://nifa.usda.gov/tool/webneers> or contact your EFNEP Program Coordinator(s) in your state for more information about that data collection process. National impact reports and other data can be found at <http://nifa.usda.gov/resource/efnep-2014-national-reports>.

For SNAP-Ed, the Education and Administrative Reporting System (EARS) and annual reports are used. For more information, see <http://snap.nal.usda.gov/national-snap-ed/snap-ed-plan-guidance-and-templates>.

Can the research project be done independent of the regional centers' work? If not, are we expected to work within the geographic region of which we are a part, or can we work with another regional center where we have an established working relationship?

The RFA stipulates that the research project must be connected to an existing regional center. This could happen in a variety of ways. The regional center could apply directly. Another eligible institution could apply and could secure a letter of cooperation and support from the regional center wherein it is located. Or the eligible institution could apply and secure a letter of cooperation and support from a regional center in a different part of the country based on working relationships that have already been established. If the latter option is used, the applicant would be strongly encouraged to contact the regional center director for the region wherein he/she is located as a matter of common courtesy and to further the spirit of cooperation and collegiality that is fundamental to this initiative.

Several questions have been received about trying new approaches for the research project and then measuring those for participants and non-participants. Questions pertained to whether the new approaches could be used, especially as pertains to EFNEP. Question also been raised about NIFA's desire for long-term studies to see if short-term results are reflected over time – i.e. is NIFA still interested in long-term studies?

The intent of the research project is to focus on current nutrition education/obesity prevention approaches being used, whether long-term or more recent, and to determine what, if any longer term changes are identified in participants' behaviors. EFNEP and SNAP-Ed are both reporting changes as a result of program participation. What we need is stronger evidence of changes that are observed among participants vs. non-participants, and changes that continue beyond recent participation. The intent of this project is to begin to look at changes over time in a more rigorous manner.

### **EFNEP and SNAP-Ed Expectations**

To be more competitive, should new research projects incorporate both SNAP-Ed and EFNEP? Similarly, do both have to be included in a new project?

The RNECE Initiative represents collaboration between FNS and NIFA with respect to SNAP-Ed and EFNEP at the federal level. Both programs should be incorporated for each project.

## **Research, Education, and Extension Terminology and Requirements for Integrated Grants**

What does 'extension' mean for these integrated projects, as noted on pages 34 and 35 of the RFA? Are these projects limited to the official lists of 1864 and 1890 land-grant institutions?

For the AFRI-RNECE RFA (program area code A2151), Extension refers to all EFNEP and SNAP-Ed programming. See footnote, page 11 of the RFA.

Notably, these projects are expected to benefit both EFNEP and SNAP-Ed. Since EFNEP is conducted through the Cooperative Extension System of 1862 and 1890 land-grant institutions, linkages with these institutions will be important – just not at the exclusion of other organizations and agencies.

## **eXtension Community Nutrition Community of Practice (COP)**

An expectation to contribute to eXtension's COP is noted in several places within the RFA. Generally it says that projects can contribute to existing COPs or form a new COP; whereas pages 16 and 17 indicate that the Community Nutrition COP is to be used. Which guidelines should we follow?

For SNAP-Ed (and EFNEP) a COP has already been established. It is the Community Nutrition COP. Therefore, the RNECE projects should contribute to that body of work.

Is there a specific link for the Community Nutrition COP?

Yes. See the RFA, page 16. It is [http://extension.org/low\\_income\\_nutrition\\_education](http://extension.org/low_income_nutrition_education). For quick reference, the site contact is Ms. Sandy Jensen, [Sandra.jensen@sdstate.edu](mailto:Sandra.jensen@sdstate.edu); or 605-688-4944. Sandy's contact information is also listed on the Community Nutrition COP homepage.

What are the expectations for an agreement between the Community Nutrition Community of Practice (COP) and the regional centers? Is a general letter of support sufficient? What about copyright issues? What about linking with other websites?

The RNECE Centers, potentially, will have a significant place within the eXtension Community Nutrition COP. Exactly what that presence will be and how information will be linked and shared is yet to be worked out. It is likely that the RNECE Centers will help inform such decisions in order to make information readily and appropriately available, whatever the venue may be.

In order to secure a letter of support from the Community Nutrition COP, applicants should draft a letter to the COP contact, and include potential ways that they may work together. Some examples might be providing content, contributing to the design and specific elements, and/or contributing time and resources if substantively further developing the site. Helping to build out the RNECE component of the COP would be an expectation of all awardees. This would be done in cooperation with the owners and managers of the site.

Is a letter of support needed from the eXtension Community Nutrition Community of Practice for both types of awards for Program Area Code A2151?

Yes.

The last paragraph on page 16, indicates a requirement to coordinate with the eXtension Community Nutrition Education Community of Practice (CoP). For applicants that are not part of the Extension system, does this not put them at a competitive disadvantage, even though their qualifications may be superior? How would this requirement be scored so as not to unfairly disadvantage others?

There is no disadvantage to applicants who are not part of the Cooperative Extension System, since requirements for coordinating with the eXtension Community Nutrition Education Community of Practice are the same for all eligible applicants.

### **Match Requirements**

For the PSE Center, is any 'match' required? If yes, must it be in cash? If in-kind, must it be from non-Federal, non-USDA, or non-NIFA or non-FNS sources? Will 'match' be scored in the review of the application?

The match requirement applies only to the specific types AFRI grants noted in the RFA. It does not apply to the RNECE grants

### **Centers of Excellence**

What is the difference between the Centers of Excellence identified in the Farm Bill and the RNECE Centers of Excellence? Are we required to apply for both?

The creation of Centers of Excellence is a central goal of the RNECE Initiative. The initiative's intent is to facilitate collaboration and strengthen the evidence of EFNEP and SNAP-Ed nationwide. By contrast, the Farm Bill provides an opportunity to voluntarily self-identify as a potential center of excellence for research and integrated grants. Such requests may become a factor in the review process if proposals are ranked highly meritorious. For more information about NIFA's implementation of the 2014 Farm Bill Center of Excellence provision, see [http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/NIFA\\_centers\\_of\\_excellence.pdf](http://nifa.usda.gov/sites/default/files/resource/NIFA_centers_of_excellence.pdf)

### **Existing Projects**

What are the current projects that Centers are working on so that we can complement or not duplicate efforts?

To learn about the signature projects that are underway, applicants are encouraged to contact the Regional Centers directly. A contact list, which aligns states with the respective centers has been developed. It can be found in the webinar slides, and on the NIFA RNECE program site – see <http://www.nifa.usda.gov/program/regional-nutrition-education-and-obesity-prevention-centers-excellence-rnece>, and scroll to program specific resources.

### **Miscellaneous**

Is there an expectation about advanced degree requirements for PIs or Co-PI, such as a PhD, DrPH?  
No such requirement has been included in the RFA.

Can we apply for more than one-type of Childhood Obesity Prevention Grant – i.e. is there any restriction to applying for an RNECE grant and another type of AFRI Childhood Obesity Grant simultaneously?

Although there is not prohibition against applying for more than one grant, such action is not encouraged as it may result in weaker proposals. Applicants are encouraged to focus their efforts to submit the strongest proposals, possible.

This seems an ambitious RFA – what is expected for the time allotted and resources available. It takes several years to conduct a community assessment, prepare and implement, and then evaluate a public health plan, especially where there are constrained resources. What exactly is NIFA expecting?

NIFA (and FNS) recognize that the RNECE Initiative is an ambitious endeavor. At the same time, we have a sense that there is already good work underway or that has been developed, along

with expertise yet to be tapped. Potential applicants are encouraged to review the RFA and consider how, working with others, they can contribute to the RNECE body of evidence.

How many collaborators are expected? Is there a minimum number?

The RFA does not include a specific numerical expectation for collaboration. Rather it encourages inclusivity – thinking through what types of expertise might be important to accomplish what the proposal sets out to do, and what is possible with the resources available.